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Housing help

Scams and fraud

Taxes

Travel

[Home](#) > [Voting and elections](#) > [Voting and election laws](#) > Voting rights laws

Voting and elections

Voter registration

How, where, and when to vote

Decide who to vote for

Find my state or local election office

Congressional, state, and local elections

Voting and election laws

Voter ID requirements

Is voting mandatory?

Voter fraud,

Voting rights laws and constitutional amendments

Federal laws govern voting rights. Learn about the laws and how they protect your rights and make it easier for you to vote.

U.S. election laws date back to Article 1 of the Constitution. This gave states the responsibility of overseeing federal elections. Many constitutional amendments and federal laws to protect voting rights have been passed since then.

Constitutional amendments affecting voting rights

suppression and
other crimes

Voting rights laws

Voter accessibility
laws

Federal campaign
finance laws

Presidential election
process

Inauguration of the
president

Results of past
elections

- The [15th Amendment](#) gave African American men the right to vote in 1870. But many weren't able to exercise this right. Some states used literacy tests and other barriers to make it harder to vote.
- The [19th Amendment](#), ratified in 1920, gave American women the right to vote.
- The [24th Amendment](#), ratified in 1964, eliminated poll taxes. The tax had been used in some states to keep African Americans from voting in federal elections.
- The [26th Amendment](#), ratified in 1971, lowered the voting age for all elections to 18.

Federal voting rights laws

State voter ID laws

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Scams and fraud

Taxes

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Federal laws passed over the years help protect Americans' right to vote and make it easier for citizens to exercise that right:

- The Civil Rights Acts created some of the earliest federal protections against discrimination in voting. These protections were first outlined by the [Civil Rights Act of 1870](#) and were later amended by the:
 - [Civil Rights Act of 1957](#)
 - [Civil Rights Act of 1960](#)
 - [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)
- The [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#) prohibited voter discrimination based on race, color, or membership in a language minority group. It also required certain places to provide election materials in languages besides English.
 - The act also placed limits on certain states with a history of voter discrimination. These states had to get federal approval before passing voter restrictions. [A 2013 Supreme Court decision](#) struck down this rule.
- The [Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984](#) required polling places to be accessible to people with disabilities.
- [The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act \(UOCAVA\) of 1986](#) allowed members of the U.S. armed forces and U.S. voters abroad to register and vote by mail.
- The [National Voter Registration Act \(NVRA\) of 1993](#)

created new ways to register to vote. It also called for states to keep more accurate voter registration lists.

- The [Help America Vote Act \(HAVA\) of 2002](#) authorized federal funds for elections. It also created the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission \(EAC\)](#). The EAC helps states comply with HAVA to adopt minimum standards on voter education, registration, and ballots.
- The [Military and Overseas Voting Empowerment \(MOVE\) Act of 2009](#) improved access to voting by military voters and voters living outside of the U.S.

Learn more about the federal laws that protect your ability to vote with [Know Your Voting Rights](#), from the Department of Justice.

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